

RIDDLES OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

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FOREWORD

The following riddles were collected, during the past year, in Middle Tennessee, especially in the mountain sections. The riddles were obtained through conversations with the older inhabitants, and also through the co-operation of teachers and college students who live in the different counties of this section of the state.

The "old timers" as many of the elderly people call themselves remember when "riddling" was "all the fashion," but admit that riddles are losing in popularity and "that they skersely ever hears a new 'un any more."

This collection of riddles merely illustrates the research possibilities in this phase of Tennessee folklore. It is the hope of the writer that much work will be done in this direction while the material is still available.

T. J. Farr.



FOLK RIDDLES

1. It goes all over the hills, but doesn't eat,
It goes to the creek but doesn't drink.

(A cowbell.)

2. It goes in dry and comes out wet.
It tickles your stomach and makes you sweat.

(A washboard.)

3. House full, yard full
Can't catch a spoonful.

(Smoke.)

4. I don't have it and I don't want it,
And if I had it, I wouldn't take a million dollars for it.

(Bald Head.)

5. Two ducks in front of two ducks,
Two ducks behind two ducks,
Two ducks between two ducks,
How many ducks are there?

(Four.)

6. It goes all over hills and plains
But when it comes to a river, it breaks its neck.

(A path.)

7. It grows in the woods; it bellows in towns
If you guess this riddle I'll give you five pounds.

(A fiddle.)

8. Wild and Woolly and full of fleas
Never been curried above the knees.

(A horse.)

9. Round as a biscuit, busy as a bee
Prettiest little thing I ever did see.

(A watch.)

10. All over the hills and back home at night,
Sits under the bed and gapes for bones.

(Shoes)

11. Twelve pears hanging high
Twelve men passing by
Each takes one
Eleven pears left there.

(The man's name was Each)

12. It can run, and it can walk,
It has a tongue and can't talk.

(A Wagon.)

13. Four legs and four eyes,
It can't walk and can't see.

(A stove.)

14. Black we are but much admired,
Men seek for us till they are tired.
We tire the horses, but comfort man
Tell me this riddle if you can.

(Lumps of coal.)

15. In marble walls as white as milk,
Lined with a skin of softest silk
Within a fountain crystal clear
A golden apple doth appear
No doors there are to this stronghold
Yet things break in and steal the gold.

(An egg.)

16. As I was going over Westminster Bridge,
I met with a Westminster scholar;
He pulled off his cap and drew off his glove,
And wished me a very good morrow.
What is his name?

(Andrew.)

17. What is it that goes up a tree and down a tree,
Has eyes and can't see?

(A button.)

18. As I was going across London Bridge
I peeped down through a crack.
I saw Old Mother Hubbard with a blanket on her back.

(A mud-turtle.)

19. High as a castle, weak as a wastle,
But all the king's horses couldn't pull it down.

(Smoke.)

20. It stands on its one leg with its heart in its head.

(Cabbage.)

21. What has feet and legs and nothing else?

(Stockings.)

22. What makes boys smoke?

(They are too green to burn.)

23. Why is a piece of paper with holes in it like a preacher?

(They are both holy.)

24. What do lawyers do when they die?

(They lie still.)

25. What object has two heads and one body?

(A barrell.)

26. What goes all the way around the house and doesn't
make a track?

(The wind.)

27. Whitey in a whitey, whitey sent a whitey to get a whitey out of whitey.

(A white cow in a white cotton patch.)

28. Why does a beggar wear a short coat?

(Because it will be long enough before he can get another.)

29. What is it that is too much for one, enough for two, and nothing at all for three?

(A secret.)

30. What tongue goes to the creek but never drinks?

(A wagon-tongue.)

31. It's as green as grass but not grass,
It's as red as blood but not blood,
It's as black as ink but not ink.
What is it?

(A blackberry.)

32. What will go up a drain down, but will not go down a drain up?

(An umbrella.)

33. Patch upon patch
With a hole in the middle,
Who will tell me this riddle
I'll give a gold fiddle.

(A chimney.)

34. As round as a ring,
As deep as a spring,
And the death of many a little thing.

(A gun.)

35. It goes all over the hills and hollows;
It comes in at night and sits by the fire.

(Milk.)

36. Long legs, short thighs, bald head, no eyes.

(Tongs.)

37. What begins with P and ends with E, and has a thousand letters?

(Postoffice.)

38. It runs all day and never gets tired.

(A river.)

39. It has eighteen legs and catches flies. (flies)

(A baseball team.)

40. Black within and red without,
Has four corners 'round about.

(A chimney.)

41. It's between heaven and earth
And it's not on a tree,
I've told you this riddle
As plain as can be.

(A knot on a tree.)

42. It's as crooked as a rainbow, and it has teeth
like a cat.

(A briar.)

43. Big at the bottom and little at the top
Something in the middle that goes flippity-flop.

(A churn.)

44. Runs and jumps, stops and humps.

(A rabbit.)

45. It opens like a barn door and shuts like a bat,
Guess all your life and you can't guess that.

(An umbrella.)

46. Luke has it in front, Paul has it behind, Sally has it twice in the middle, girls have it once, and boys don't have it at all.

(The letter L.)

47. What band never plays?

(A hat band.)

48. What bow is never tied?

(Rainbow.)

49. Why is a person's nose in the middle of his face?

(It is the (scenter) center.)

50. As I went through the garden gap,
Who should I meet but Dick Red Cap,
A stick in his hand, a stone in his throat
If you will guess this riddle, I'll give you a goat.

(A cherry.)

51. Ears like a mule, tail like a cotton boll, runs like a fool.

(A rabbit.)

52. Why is there never such a thing as a whole day?

(Every day begins by breaking.)

53. Two lookers, two crookers, four down hangers, and a switch about.

(A horny cow.)

54. Why can't onions and potatoes be planted together?

(Onions get in the potatoes' eyes.)

55. Which is the oldest tree in the world?

(The elder.)

56. The man who makes it does not use it,
The man who buys it does not use it,
The man who uses it does not know anything about it.

(A coffin.)

57. Big on both ends, little in the middle
Paws up the dirt and plays like a fiddle.

(A dirt dauber.)

58. It has a tongue and can't talk;
It has eyes and can't see.

(A shoe.)

59. It has a head like a cat, feet like a cat,
A tail like a cat, but it isn't a cat.

(A kitten.)

60. Big and round, hard and sound,
Eyes and can't see.

(Irish Potato.)

61. Four legs up and four legs down
Hard all around and soft in the middle.

(A bed.)

62. What is it that has teeth and can't eat?

(A rake.)

63. What is it that has four legs and one back,
Yet can't walk.

(A chair.)

64. Great long slick fellow
Spring his trigger and hear him bellow.

(A gun.)

65. As I went across the field, I picked up something
good to eat,
It was neither flesh, fish, nor bone
But I kept it three weeks until it stood alone.

(An egg.)

66. Brown I am and much admired, many horses have I tired,
I tire a horse and weary a man, tell me this riddle if
you can.

(A saddle.)

67. What has a mouth but can't talk?

(A river.)

68. What's the difference between one yard and two yards?

(A fence.)

69. As I was going down the road one day, I met old Nellie
Gray,
I ate her meat, I drank her blood, and threw her skin
away.

(A watermelon.)

70. Blackey went in blackey, blackey came out of blackey,
and blackey left whitey in blackey.

(A black hen went in a black stump and laid a white egg.)

71. What goes upstairs on its head?

(A shoe tack.)

72. Where do fish wash their faces?

(In the river basin.)

73. As I was going 'cross London Bridge
I met a cart of guinea pigs.
They were kicked; they were hacked.
They were all yellow-backed.

(Oranges.)

74. What is it that has two sides and a thousand ribs?

(A railroad.)

75. Hippety hop upstairs; hippity hop downstairs
If you don't watch out, hippety hop will bite you.

(A wasp.)

76. Round as a ring and black as coal,
Has a long thing and a tooth hole.

(A frying pan.)

77. A tailor got three men's shirts out of one yard.
How did he do it?

(He took them off the clothes-line.)

78. It goes all over the mountains on its head,
And it sleeps on its head.

(A horseshoe nail.)

79. Round as a pail and black as coal
Little short tail and a thumping hole.

(A skillet.)

80. It has four legs and a foot and can't walk,
It has a head and can't talk.

(A bed.)

81. Old Mother Hubbard has but one eye
And a long tail which she can let fly.
Every time she goes over a gap
She leaves a bit of her tail in the trap.

(A needle and thread.)

82. As I was going across London Bridge,
I met my sister Ann.
I broke her neck and sucked her blood,
And let her body stand.

(A bottle of wine.)

83. Tall as a house, low as a mouse
Bitter as gall, but sweet after all.

(A walnut.)

84. A beggar had a brother,
The brother died; yet the man who died had no brother.

(The beggar was a woman.)

85. Why does a lady's house dress out-last all others?

(She never wears it out.)

86. As I went up the hill I met my sister Nancy
I pulled off her head and sucked her blood and left
her body dancing.

(A blackberry.)

87. A man with no eyes saw plums on a tree,
He neither took plums nor left plums,
How can this be?

(A man with one eye saw two plums on a tree,
and he took one plum and left one.)

88. Why is the city Athens like the wick of a candle?
(It's in the middle of Greece.)

89. Twenty white horses upon a red hill,
Now they champ, now they clamp, now they stand still.

(Teeth and gums.)

90. Down the hill and across the hollow
It has a mouth and can't swallow.

(A cowbell)

91. Round as an apple and as thin as a knife,
Answer this riddle and I'll be your wife.

(A dime.)

92. Green head, yellow toes,
If you don't tell me this riddle, I'll ring your nose.

(A duck.)

93. Up and down, in and out
No one knows what it's all about.

(A quivering leaf on a tree when the wind is not blowing)

94. Round as a cup and deep as a cup,
The Tennessee River can't fill it up.

(Tea strainer.)

95. Black on top of black with six legs down and three
legs up.

(A negro on a mule with a kettle on his head.)

96. What is it that sets on four legs and smokes a pipe.

(Stove.)

97. Up and down, up and down
Touching neither sky nor ground.

(Pump handle.)

98. Why do watermelons have water in them?

(They were planted in the spring.)

99. A riddle, a riddle as I suppose,
A thousand eyes, but never a nose.

(Sieve.)

100. As I went across the Cumberland Mountain,
I met a gang of people.
Some were nick and some were nack
And some had colors on their back.
What kind of people were they?

(Quail.)

101. As I went over London bridge
I saw a heap of people.
Some were nickey and some were nackey
Some were the color of brown tobacco.

(Quail.)

102. Why does a chimney smoke?

(It can't chew.)

103. A dish full of all kinds of flowers,
you can't guess this riddle in two hours.

(Honey.)

104. It has two hands, but it can't work.

(Clock.)

105. It has a head, but can't think.

(A match.)

106. Long, slim, and black,
Touch its cock and it will crack.

(A gun.)

107. Why is a clock like a river?

(It does not run long without winding.)

108. Why is a colt and an egg alike?

(They both have to be broken before being used.)

109. It's between heaven and earth and is not on a tree,
In this riddle, I have told you but you can't tell me.

(Knot on a tree.)

110. It's as red as blood and not blood,
Green as grass and not grass,
White as snow and not snow.

(Cedar tree.)